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Foucault Now?[1]

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It has been twenty-one years since Foucault's death. Think for a moment of what this means. In 1984, there was no internet, there were no DVDs, no cell phones, CDs were just coming into existence, TIVO was a distant dream, and we could drive around without having to deal with sport utility vehicles. It was, many would claim, a different world. My children make that claim, and they express wonder at the fact that we were somehow able to conduct our lives under those conditions.

And yet, nearly a generation after Foucault's death, we return to this thinker, this historian, this philosopher, as though he still speaks to us, as though we had not yet exhausted the meanings of his words. So, we are confronted with the question: what do we make of Foucault now? What remains for us to learn from him? What remains for us to think about and to act upon in the wake of his writings?

To begin to get a grip on these questions, allow me to step back and ask another one. It is a question associated with the discipline of philosophy, but it ought not to be. Or at least it ought not to be associated solely with the discipline of philosophy. It ought to be associated with all disciplines, and with our lives. It is a question that will not be foreign to anyone who is reading this. The question is: Who are we? It is a question that, in Foucault's hands, will turn into another question, but for reasons it would be worth pausing over.

Consider the answer to the question of who we are offered by a classic philosopher, René Descartes. Descartes tells us that we are a combination of a mental substance that thinks and a physical substance that acts, a mind and a body: two separate types of entities that meet for some reason in the pineal gland. For Descartes, to be who we are is essentially to be a certain kind of being, a certain kind of ontological arrangement. There are other things that

1 This paper was first given as an address to the inaugural conference of the Foucault Society at the New School in New York on May 13, 2005. My thanks to the organizers of the conference for the opportunity, especially Yunus Tuncel, David Carlson, and Martin Parkins, to present the paper.

are perhaps relevant to us, but the essential lies here: in our constitution as mental/physical beings.

Or consider another thinker, closer to our own time: Sigmund Freud. Freud also offers us an answer to the question of who we are. For Freud, we are a set of conflicts, more or less successfully resolved. To be a human being is to face these conflicts, to face the fractured inheritance that is our lot, the legacy of internal disharmony that has been passed down to us through generations extending back at least to Moses, and in all likelihood well before that.

Descartes and Freud offer very different answers to the question of who we are. What they converge on, however, and what so many thinkers that have provided the framework for our thinking about who we are—from Plato and Aristotle through the history of Christian thought to modern philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre—what they converge upon is that the answer to this question lies in some essential character that we possess. Whoever it is that we are, it must be discovered in something timeless about us, something that gives each of us in this room a deep affinity with the medieval peasant or the ancient Greek warrior. To put the point another way, to answer the question of who we are, one need not, and perhaps one cannot, appeal to the contingencies of our history. This, of course, is precisely where Foucault's thought becomes relevant to us.

To appeal to the contingencies of history is not merely to appeal to history. Many thinkers have done that. Karl Marx, for instance, sees history as the unfolding of our human essence. For Marx, at least in his early writings, and perhaps underlying the later ones as well, our ability to be fully human, to be what we are, to express what he calls our *species-being*, requires the passage through a tumultuous history. That passage will eventually create the conditions that allow us to reveal the human character. We were born to a scarcity that requires the mechanisms of history, the tacking back and forth of the dialectic, to overcome. Without that history, we would be nothing more than primitive hunter-gatherers, animals incapable of achieving our full nature.

Marx takes history into account, to be sure. He is wedded to it, to its necessity and to the inescapability of its making us into who we are. But it is precisely to its *necessity* that he is wedded, not to its contingency. To take us as beings that are the products of a contingent history is not merely to say that our essence *unfolds* in our history, that our history *reveals* who we are. To hold that we unfold or reveal ourselves through time does not take history seriously enough. For Marx and for others like him, history itself becomes hostage to our essence or subordinate to an underlying principle that drives it in the direction in which we find it going. If we are to take history seriously, and to take ourselves seriously as historical beings, we must recognize the contingency of history. We must come to grips with the fact that history did

not have take the routes that it did, that it might have happened otherwise. And that we, as products of that history, might have happened differently as well.

Nothing outside of a fragile and contingent history made us who we are. That, as it will turn out, is at once our nature and our hope. As Foucault tells us, "There is an optimism that consists in saying that things couldn't be better. My optimism would rather consist in saying that so many things can be changed, fragile as they are, bound up more with circumstances than with necessities, more arbitrary than self-evident, more a matter of complex, but temporary, historical circumstances than with inevitable anthropological constraints."[2]

Many of us are familiar with these fragile historical circumstances. In the spirit of keeping them before us, allow me to relate one. I would like to begin it with the words *Once upon a time*. We must bear in mind, however, that when a Foucaultian story begins with the words *Once upon a time*, it is for the opposite reasons that most stories begin that way. When our parents told us a story that began with those words, it was to mark the beginning of a thread that was to connect the place the story began with the place that it ended, a continuous trajectory that ran its course from the first moment to the last. When Foucault's stories begin, the *Once upon a time* inherent in their beginning marks the place from which the thread is broken, not from which it begins to unspool. In other words, it marks a point of contingency in the history of who we are.

Once upon a time, when people went to the Catholic confessional they told their priests of the sinful acts they had committed. They confessed their thieveries, their adulteries, their acts of violence and impiety. Once upon a time, there was a world divided into the permitted and the forbidden. When one performed acts that were forbidden, one confessed them in the hope of their absolution. One had crossed a line; confessional was a way to cross back. Then something changed. Around the time of the Council of Trent, which ran from 1545 to 1563, the confessional took on an altered character. Two fundamental changes emerged. First, one was to confess one's acts differently. In particular, sexual violations were not to be described in so much detail; speaking of sex must become more discrete. However, if the depiction of sexuality narrowed, its range widened. One was to speak less, but to confess more. Not merely acts, but also thoughts and desires were to be confessed. Sexual violations were to be traced back from their acts to their origins, even when those origins did not actually issue out onto a particular violation. As Foucault puts the point, "According to the new pastoral, sex must not be

2 Michel Foucault, "Practicing Criticism," an interview with Didier Eribon, trans. Alan Sheridan, in *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman. (New York: Routledge, 1988), 156.

named imprudently, but its aspects, its correlations, and its effects must be pursued down to their slenderest ramifications: a shadow in a daydream, in image too slowly dispelled, a badly exorcised complicity between the body's mechanics and the mind's complacency: everything had to be told."[3]

With the telling of everything, one's thoughts and particularly one's desires, a person's sexual character gradually displaced the acts one committed as the heart of confession. One's acts, after all, were simply expressions of one's character. It was who one was in the depth of one's being that counted. From the gradual revision of the Catholic confessional to Freud the critic of religion there is a straight line to be drawn, a line that involves sexual desire as the key to unlock the mystery of one's nature. Once upon a time there were only acts to be told. Then something happened and there were desires to be confessed, desires that revealed not only what one did but who one was.

This is not all. There is not a single story to be told, a story simply of the confessional. Stories are always multiple and intersecting. Once upon a time, there was feudalism. Then capitalism developed, and with it the need to monitor populations so as to utilize them in the most efficient way. With the rise of capitalism came the rise of population studies. And with the concern about population came the concern with sex, this time from another angle. Who we are as a confessing being and who we are as participants in capitalism being began to intersect. This is why, as Foucault tells us, the sexual revolution of the 1960s did not liberate us from a repressed sexuality. Sexuality has been with us for hundreds of years, discrete but pervasive. The sexual revolution, the call to express one's sexuality, is simply the Catholic confessional and the psychoanalyst's couch by other means.

And then again, alongside the confessional and capitalism, once upon a time medicine, inasmuch as it was psychiatric medicine, was concerned with delirium. Then, with the rise of the confessional of desires and the increasing concern with sexuality, it became concerned with instincts. In this concern, it was above all sexual instincts that provided the key to abnormality. "The flesh of concupiscence…provides a model for the conceptualization and analysis of instinctual disorder."[4]

Once upon a time we were not sexual beings, beings defined by our sexual character. Now we are. What does it mean to say that we are beings defined by our sexual character? Has history unfolded in such a way as to reveal to us who we are, as though finally, after missing it for all these

3 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, tr. Robert Hurley. (New York: Random House, 1978), 19.

4 Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, tr. Graham Burchell. (New York: Picador, 2003), 224.

centuries, we recognize that we are beings defined by our desire? Were we such beings all along, only now it has become clear to us? Hardly.

Are we sexual beings at this moment in our history—or, for we will return to this, were we sexual beings in 1976, when Foucault published the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*? Yes, we are, or at least we were. We are other types of beings as well, for instance disciplinary ones, as Foucault tells us in his history of the prisons. There is not a single story to tell, but instead many stories. As John Berger reminds us, "Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one."[5]

But we are indeed also sexual beings. The key, however, is that we are so not by necessity, neither by an essential nature that has made us that way and that we have only recently come to discover, nor by a history whose inevitable unfolding has revealed to us who we are. We are sexual beings because a contingent history, one that has been different and that indeed could become different, has, for this moment, deposited us on these shores. We are sexual beings because we are historical beings, because who we are is the product of a history that just happened to take this course rather than another one. This is why, as I mentioned earlier, in Foucault's hands the question of who we are is turned into another one. For us, the question is not so much, Who are we? as it is, Who are we now?, or, as Foucault sometimes asks it, What is our present?

When we ask who we are we must not ask after a nature that lies behind us or that has made us what we are. Neither are we to ask after a telos that lies before us and draws us toward it. We are not to ask what we have been revealed to be. We are, instead, to ask how we have come to be who we are, how the multiple strands of our history have led us to be this being and not another at this particular moment. For those of us who are philosophers, approaching ourselves this way is difficult. We have been taught that the question of who we are is not a historical one but rather a transcendental one. The appeal to empirical facts, to an understanding of the (often petty) practices that make us who we are violates our philosophical instincts. If Foucault is a philosopher, it is because he is a historian.

But it is not only philosophers who find his approach difficult. Many historians as well balk at Foucault's project. It is, for their taste, too philosophical. Foucault does not just give us the facts. He does not write as though history were merely an accounting of the past, the recitation of parchments that belong to another time. If Foucault is a historian, it is because he is a philosopher. His studies are reflections on the question of who we are, even as they shift the ground for asking that question from the realm of the eternal and immutable to that of the contingent and changeable.

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5 John Berger, *G.* (New York: Pantheon, 1980; orig. pub. 1972), 133.

It is Foucault, then, Foucault himself who leads us to the question of Foucault Now. It is above all his own writings that require us to ask whether the histories of the present that he has offered us are still histories of our own present, or whether the present we inhabit requires other histories, other stories. If we are to take Foucault seriously, not merely to turn his works into an exercise of academic interpretation but to see in them the roots of our very character, of the structure of our present, then we must face the question his own works raise: what remains to us of Foucault Now?

Surely, one will respond, Foucault is as relevant now as he has always been. After all, it is only twenty years since his death. Academic fashions may come and go in this time, but has the character of our present really changed so much? Are we not still the sexual beings we were in 1976; are we not the disciplinary beings Foucault describes in his book on the prisons? The answer to this question is not obvious. Foucault himself delineates sharp breaks in history, points where who we are begins to veer off from one path toward another. There are periods of no more than twenty or thirty years during which transitions from one set of practices constituting who we are to another are, if not coalesced, at least begun. For instance, in *The Birth of the Clinic* he traces the change in medical views of disease, and thus of the relation of life and death, from an essentialist model to one of lesions. This change takes place from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth in a period of little more than two dozen years.

Are we in such a period? Is our history at another crossroads, where what we will become diverges sharply from what we have been? We cannot respond to this question by parroting Foucault's analyses; his own works have barred this path to us. We must look closely at ourselves and at the history that has intervened in these years, asking ourselves where we have been and how that may or may not have made us different from who we were when Foucault writes his histories of sexuality, the prisons, madness, or medicine.

And to the question of whether we indeed occupy another historical space, whether we are indeed becoming something other than what we have been, many would answer in the affirmative. We have indeed entered a new historical period, one that has already altered the texture of our being and will continue to do so. This new historical period, although nascent during the period of Foucault's writings, has emerged to challenge the portrayal of our present that he offers. Consider, for a moment, three approaches to understanding our world that tell us that we have gone beyond Foucault, that, in essence, we can no longer turn to Foucault for an understanding of our present, of who we are now.

The first comes from his colleague Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze tells us that, in contrast to the disciplinary society Foucault delineates, we have now entered a society of what he calls "control."

> We're moving toward control societies that no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication….New kinds of punishment, education, health care are being stealthily introduced. Open hospitals and teams providing home health care have been around for some time. One can envisage education becoming less and less a closed site differentiated from the workspace as another closed site, but both disappearing and giving way to frightful continual training, to continual monitoring of worker-schoolkids or bureaucrat-students."[6]

Deleuze argues that we are no longer bound by the disciplinary model Foucault portrays in his book on the prisons, a model that sees people confined within specific spaces where they are monitored, intervened upon, and normalized. Instead, we are inserted into open networks of communication and relay, networks that do not determine us by discrete periods of training that takes places at specific sites—school, then military, then work—but by a digital web that is woven around us as we are woven into it.

A different but not entirely unrelated view of our present is offered by Jean Baudrillard. He challenges Foucault's view that who we are is a product of intersecting practices, each with its own power to create different aspects of us. In particular, the idea of power producing us is, in his view, anachronistic. "When one talks so much about power, it's because it can no longer be found anywhere. The same goes for God: the stage in which he was everywhere came just before the one in which he was dead."[7] For Baudrillard, the model of power and production is an industrial one, inadequate to the post-industrial society we now inhabit. If we are to understand our present, we must look instead to the virtual realities arising around us, immaterial worlds that have come to replace the material world as our living reality. It is the images of television rather than what those images may or may not depict that is the fabric of our world. History itself is lost to a present that has no more use for it than for the reality it pretends to portray. We live in an age of what Baudrillard calls "hyper-reality," where the only function of a place like Disneyland is to give us the illusion that the world outside its gates is actually real.

Finally, there are many who would argue that the new age we have entered is one of globalization. It is an age where instantaneous communication has changed the economic structure of societies and the relation of individuals to those structures. No longer is our identity determined by the fact of our being producers of goods; it is determined by the fact of our being consumers of them. No longer are we bound to

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6 Gilles Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," in *Negotiations 1972-1990*, tr. Martin Joughin. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 174-5.

. Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault*, tr. Nicole Dufresne. (New York: Semiotext(e), 1987), 60.

companies that, in return for our labor, promise us a steady if monotonous career; we are now subject to shifting movements of capital and work that may benefit us one day and leave us bereft the next. No longer are we citizens of a nation-state for which companies are among the resources of that nation; the nation-state is ending its short-lived reign and we are now becoming directly subject to capital itself.

These three accounts of our present have much in common. They are rooted in the technological advances of the past thirty or forty years. They see our recent history as breaking with its slightly less recent past. They ascribe a determining power to the intertwining of transnational capitalism and the rise of a digital culture. For them, 1976 is a long time ago. As a result, they would account Foucault's histories of sexuality, of the prison, and of madness as belonging to another age, an epoch that precedes rather than coincides with our own.

These accounts have something else in common as well, something that renders them as much pre- as post-Foucaultian. They are accounts that approach our present from far above the ground. They look down upon our present from a great height, and as a result each sees in it a single hue. Whether we are described as relays in a digital network, consumers of hyper-reality, or subjects of global capital, we are accounted as one thing, as single something that lends itself to a particular exhaustive perspective. At times, of course, Foucault is read as reducing everything: to sexuality, to the carceral society, to Reason. However, he is badly read this way. To approach our present as though it were reducible to a unitary explanation is to approach it sloppily, without concern for detail, without responsiveness to the practices and the archives among which we live. *Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one.* Those who hold to each of these stories forget Berger's lesson. They have not yet reached Foucault, much less gone beyond him.

As Foucault reminds us in a famous essay on Nietzsche, "Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary…it must record the singularity of events outside any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history…Genealogy, consequently, requires patience and a knowledge of details and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material."[8] What the three rejections of Foucault lack is patience and a recognition of the singularity of events. They fly over our world rather than rummaging through it. Rather than gray, they see black and white. Rather than offering us a history, they offer us a snapshot—and an aerial one at that.

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8 "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice,* ed. Donald F. Bouchard, tr. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139-140.

In this, these approaches to our present, to who we are now, are not unlike the way many of us think about our current situation. We treat our world as though it were without a past, a world fully sprung just a moment before we began to reflect on it, and consequently a world that does not cease to shock us in its arbitrary and sometimes idiotic character. And, indeed, it would be naïve to deny that recent technologies reinforce this tendency. Here the analyses of Baudrillard and others like him have the ring of truth. Television, the internet, the movies, seem often to compress our world into a single moment, a moment that squeezes out the legacy that has determined it and the future to which it contributes.

It is precisely this tendency, however, that makes Foucault's approach *more* urgent rather than less. If we are told that there are no moments other than this one, if we are caught up in the urgency of our present at the expense of understanding how we arrived at it, then perhaps this is not because the contingencies of our history have become irrelevant to us now but because those contingencies have led us here. And, because they are contingencies, we can understand the path that brought us here and, in their wake, construct paths that may lead us out. Recalling and extending the remark cited earlier, Foucault himself tells us,

> so many things can be changed, fragile as they are, bound up more with circumstances than necessities, more arbitrary than self-evident, more a matter of complex, but temporary, historical circumstances than with inevitable anthropological constraints…to say that we are much more recent than we think isn't a way of taking the whole weight of history on our shoulders. It's rather to place at the disposal of the work we can do on ourselves the greatest possible share of what is presented as inaccessible to us.[9]

And perhaps that is, ultimately, the problem with the three analyses that seek to leave Foucault's studies to the past. In looking from on high, in failing to see the specific contingencies of our history, each in its own way presents change as inaccessible to us, leaving it at too far a remove from our grasp. It is not that they are fatalists: Deleuze tells that, "It's not a question of worrying or hoping for the best, but of finding new weapons."[10] For his part, Baudrillard outlines an elusive strategy of seduction and silence. However, these recommendations are as general as their analyses; they do not offer us the framework for resistance that a more nuanced approach to our present might.

The problem is not that these approaches to our present lack specific forms of guidance. Foucault is notoriously reluctant to prescribe. In the first

9 Michel Foucault, "Practicing Criticism,", 156.

10 Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," in *Negotiations*, 178.

volume of his history of sexuality, the only advice he offers is the suggestion that resistance to the current regime of sexuality ought not to be conceived in terms of sex and desire but in terms of bodies and pleasures. That is hardly a fine-grained program for action. The issue is not one of guidance but of the proper level of analysis. In approaching the question of who we are now from so far above, we cannot *see* well enough to be able to think about resistance and change. We do not need these thinkers to tell us what to do; as Foucault always knew, we can figure that out for ourselves. What we need is some assistance in understanding where we are and how we got here. In this, Deleuze and Baudrillard and those who cast our world in terms of globalization tell us something, but they do not tell us enough. And, for the purposes of assessing the relevance of Foucault's works for who we are now, they tell us very little.

None of this is meant to insist that Foucault's work on sexuality, on the prisons and on madness are indeed as relevant as they have always been. It would be striking if, given the changes our world has undergone, these constitutive areas of who we are have retained their character intact. Instead, I am urging that if we are to ask the question of Foucault Now, if we are to ponder the relevance of his works for our lives, we must approach these works with a more Foucaultian methodology. We must look around rather than looking down.

How might this work? How, for instance, might we ask about the role of sexuality in constituting our lives over the past thirty years? By engaging in a work that is, as he describes it, "gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary." Let us look at the health manuals for the past several decades, and ask how sex and sexuality figures in them. Let us research the place of sex in movies and television and on the internet. Let us peruse the self-help manuals to discover how we are supposed to talk with one another, what we are to say and what to confess. It is true that, in contrast to Foucault's time, when the sexual revolution and the centrality of Lacanian thought made people think of themselves largely in terms of sexuality, the focus on sex has lessened somewhat in public discourse, or at least the public discourse of the left. But does this mean it has lost its power in forming who we are? It was Foucault himself who pointed to the fact that sexuality was a pervasive determining factor of who we were even when we were not overtly talking about it. Is the diminishing of talk about sexual liberation a sign of a decline in the role that sexuality plays in making us who we are, or merely a shift in how that making occurs?

At the very least it should give us pause that so much of the talk of "moral values" these days relies on explicit references to sexuality: gay marriage, abortion, pornography, sex on television. Coming as I do from South Carolina, I can tell you that at least in my part of the country we are awash in sexuality. Many of our local pastors and other luminaries cannot

stop talking about it. What does this mean for who we are now? Although I do not have an answer for this, I suspect that, globalization aside, it is not entirely irrelevant.

And what of the carceral society that Deleuze argues we have moved beyond? He is surely right to say that something important has changed here. We rely less on confinement and more on a network of decentralized communication than we used to. But has this undercut surveillance and the project of normalization that arose from it? Is what we are seeing here a shift in who we are now from one epoch to another, or merely a shift of the operation of surveillance and intervention from closed sites to more open ones? And if psychology is no longer central to assessing us in terms of the normal and the abnormal, is this because normalization is no longer a constitutive feature of who we are or because the market has fulfilled the role once allotted to therapists, because what is normal no longer lies in our actions as producers but as consumers, because normality is no longer a matter of working but one of shopping?

Again, the answer to these questions is not obvious. And that is the point. We cannot tell who we are simply by noting large, if important, changes our society has undergone. We must do the spade work of investigating the unfolding history of the world we have received. We must look where historians often forget to look and where philosophers always fear to tread: on the ground, in the spaces where people live their lives. To put the point another way, if we are to ask after the relevance of Foucault's writings to us now, we must become more Foucaultian rather than less.

In this, as in much else, Foucault anticipates us. In defending his tracing of our lives in daily practices rather than large institutions, he says that,

> I do not mean in any way to minimise the importance and effectiveness of State power. I simply feel that excessive insistence on its playing an exclusive role leads to the risk of overlooking all the mechanisms and effects of power which don't pass directly via the State apparatus…In Soviet society one has the example of a State apparatus which has changed hands, yet leaves social hierarchies, family life, sexuality and the body more or less as they were in capitalist society.[11]

We are told by many that we have entered a new phase of history, that we are caught up in a novel sweep of events, that the internet changed everything, that globalization changed everything, that 9/11 changed everything. And to these claims Foucault has always one answer. Let us look, patiently, clearly, and vigilantly. And why should we look? What is the importance of what we

11 Michel Foucault, "Questions on Geography," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 72-73.

might see? Perhaps we can offer an account of who we are now, an account of our present. Of what use might this be? Wherein lies its value?

Again, and finally, Foucault stands in the place toward which we are groping. In his preface to the second volume of his history of sexuality, in a remark many of you will be familiar with, he tells us that,

> As for what motivated me, it is quite simple…It was curiosity—the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting on with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself?[12]

We must approach Foucault's work, both as we read it and as we seek to extend it to understand who we are now, not simply as a set of texts to be deciphered, commented upon, researched, psychoanalyzed, annotated, cited, and, for those of us who teach, assigned to undergraduate students as part of a new, improved canon. Nothing would be more a betrayal than to treat Foucault as a newly minted member of the Dead White Male Academy. Instead, we must treat his works as the ancients treated their philosophy; we must take them up as spiritual exercises. For the Greeks, and especially for Hellenistic philosophy, the point of a philosophical text or a teaching was not to offer more knowledgeableness but to orient one toward a way of living. As such, one returned to those texts or those teachings not because a nuance of thought had been forgotten or an inference not well understood, but because one needed to be reminded of who one was and what one might become.

It is the same, I suggest, with Foucault's writings. We return to them not to discover, for instance, whether the penal regime of torture ever overlapped with that of rehabilitation, but to recall the contingencies of our own history, and to remind ourselves—because we so often forget—that our history is indeed contingent. We return to his writings because he speaks to us, from out of our past—and, perhaps still, out of our present—of who we have been and who we are, and he does so in ways that allow us to imagine who we might become. We return to Foucault Now, and we will return to him in the future, because the freedom he sought in his life and freedom of which he gives us a glimpse in ours is, contrary to all those in power who would prefer that we not know it, a set of possibilities that remains intact before us. Our task, the task that remains to us, is to live those possibilities.

12 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, tr. Robert Hurley. (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 8.